

C  
M865K

AN ORATION  
ON  
**LIBERAL STUDIES,**

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

**PHILOMATHIAN SOCIETY,**

OF

Mount Saint Mary's College, Md.,

JUNE 29th, 1853.

---

BY O. A. BROWNSON, L. L. D.

---

BALTIMORE:  
PRINTED BY HEDIAN & O'BRIEN,  
82 BALTIMORE STREET  
MDCCCLIII.



AN ORATION

ON

**LIBERAL STUDIES,**

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PHILOMATHIAN SOCIETY,

OF

Mount Saint Mary's College, Md.,

JUNE 29th, 1853.

---

BY O. A. BROWNSON, L. L. D.

---

BALTIMORE:

PRINTED BY HEDIAN & O'BRIEN,  
82 BALTIMORE STREET,  
MDCCCLIII.



PHILOMATHIAN HALL, }  
June 29th, 1853. }

DEAR SIR:—

The Philomathian Society, of Mt. St. Mary's College presents through us, its grateful acknowledgement for the pleasure derived from your able and eloquent address of this morning, and respectfully solicits a copy for publication.

With sentiments of highest regard,

Your obedient servants,

L. T. CHATARD,  
J. F. KNIGHT,  
S. M. CHATARD,  
JNO. F. LAFARGE,  
GEO. S. HEBB,  
THOS. BOUDAR. } Committee.

O. A. BROWNSON, Esq.

---

BOSTON, July 19, 1853.

GENTLEMEN:—

In compliance with your flattering request, I place a copy of my Oration at your disposal, to publish or not, as you may judge proper.

I have the honor to be, gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

O. A. BROWNSON.

L. T. CHATARD, J. F. KNIGHT, S. M. CHATARD, &c., Committee.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2017 with funding from  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Alternates

[https://archive.org/details/orationonliberal00brow\\_0](https://archive.org/details/orationonliberal00brow_0)

# ORATION.

---

GENTLEMEN :

I thank you very sincerely for the honor of being selected as your orator on this most interesting anniversary to you and your personal friends. It is always an honor to be called upon to address those who are preparing themselves in academic halls, or having completed their academic course, are bidding adieu to the quiet and peaceful scenes of college life, and taking their leave of beloved classmates and venerated professors, to go forth and bear an active and honorable part in the multifarious affairs of this work-day world ; but it is more especially so to be invited to address a literary society connected with this venerable college of Mount St. Mary, already so rich in classic associations, so hallowed by the memory of saintly virtues, and so dear to every American Catholic heart for the eminent servants of the Church of God it has nurtured.

Although I may repeat several things which I ventured to advance in this hall some five years since, I have thought that I could not better respond to the confidence which calls me here, than by inviting my young friends to follow me in some remarks on LIBERAL STUDIES IN RELATION TO THE WANTS OF A FREE STATE. I shall have thus the advan-

tage of treating a subject to which your minds must have often been turned during your collegiate course, and of connecting what has been your occupation as students with what are to be your practical duties as American citizens.

Liberal studies, as the name itself implies, whether etymologically or historically considered, are those studies or those arts which are proper for the free as distinguished from the menial or servile classes of society, or, in more modern language, the nobility as distinguished from the people, gentlemen as distinguished from simplemen. Originally *nobleman* meant nothing more nor less than *freeman*, and in Hungary to-day all freemen are noble.

The distinction of society into two classes, the one free, the other servile, the one noble and the other low, or the one gentle and the other simple—is older than profane history, and in one form and under one name or another has always existed; and, as long as human nature remains what it is, probably will continue to exist. Perfect equality of ranks and conditions is never found, is never to be expected, and is, indeed, incompatible with the very idea of society itself. The distinction, whether a good or an evil, is a fact in all society, and in vain do we seek by political constitutions, social arrangements, and legislative enactments to obliterate or disguise it. It exists and re-appears at every step under all forms of civil polity and social organization,—in democratic America no less than in aristocratic England, feudal Germany, monarchical France, and despotic Turkey; in the so-called Free States of the North no less than in the Slave States of the South. The entire universe, having its prototype in the Eternal Nature of God, in the ever-blessed Trinity, Unity in essence and distinction in persons, is hierarchically organized and governed, and save in the sense of justice between man and man, and man and society, equality is an idle dream, an empty word,—nay, an impious word, fit only to be inscribed on the blood-red banner of the atheisti-

cal Revolutionist. Whoso seeks to reduce all men to the same level, whether by levelling downwards or by levelling upwards, wars against God and Nature. Diversities of ranks and conditions are in the order of Divine Providence, and obtain even in Heaven, where there are many mansions, and where the Saints differ from each other as one star differs from another in glory. Society without them is inconceivable, and were undesirable. It would be as dull and as monotonous as the boundless sandy plain diversified by no variety of hill and dale, mountain and valley, land and water—where the flocks and herds find no pasture, the bird no grove or bush from which to carol, and man no habitation. It would lose all its charms, all its variety, all its activity, and become stagnant and putrid as the ocean when the long calm sleeps on its bosom.

“Order is Heaven’s first law, and this confess,  
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest.”

You of the South consist of freemen and slaves, of gentle and simple, and so do we of the North. In both sections we find at bottom the same distinction of classes, though while you have the manliness to avow it, we have the art to disguise it from the careless observer, under the drapery of fine names. You call your slaves by their proper name, and while you impose upon them the duties of slaves, you relieve them from the cares and burdens of freemen; we call our slaves freemen, and impose on them the labors and burdens of slavery, while we secure to them none of the advantages of freedom. The only advantage we can claim over you is, that our slaves being of the same race and color with our freemen, are individually less hopelessly slaves than yours. The class is as permanent with us as with you; but individuals of the class may more easily escape from it, and rise in their own persons or in their children to the class of freemen. But on the other hand, if our slaves are under certain aspects less slaves than yours, our freemen are less free

than yours. The Southern gentleman has a personal freedom and independence, which we rarely find in the Northern gentleman, and which give to Southern manners a charm, a freshness, an ease, and a grace, which our Northern manners, I am sorry to say, for the most part lack.

It is of no use to war against this inevitable distinction. To attempt either with you or with us, to obliterate it and make all freemen can result only in the destruction of freedom and the reduction of all to slavery; as the attempt to make all gentlemen can end only in leaving no gentlemen, and in reducing all to simplemen, with low and vulgar tastes, habits, and manners. It is then our duty to accept the distinction of classes as a social fact, permanent and indestructible in civilized society, and conform to it in all our political and social arrangements.

The strength and glory of a nation depend not on the vulgar, the commonalty, the low born, the servile, or the simple, but on its freemen, its gentlemen, its nobility. It is one of the saddest as well as one of the silliest mistakes of our age, that the few may be safely overlooked, and for all that is great and good, wise and just in the action of the state or of society, reliance must be placed on the many, on the masses so-called. But a nation is wise and great, good and just, only in its freemen, its noblemen; and a great nation without nobles or gentlemen, titled or untitled, is an unheard of anomaly. You may tell me there is no army without private soldiers; but there is even less an army without a general. It is the man, Bonaparte was accustomed to say, not the men that is the principal thing. Give us the man qualified to organize and command an army, and an army he will rarely lack. He will find everywhere the materials needed. All troops are brave under brave and competent officers, and no matter how brave the men may naturally be, they will be cowards in action if their officers are incompetent or white livered. As long as the gentry and nobility of

a country retain their integrity, are high-minded, patriotic and virtuous, really deserving the name of *generosi*, it stands firm, and has in itself the recuperative energy speedily to recover from any reverses it may for a moment experience ; but let these fail, or let them become corrupt, base and selfish in their principles and feelings, real churls in their character, and you may see the hand writing on the wall recording its doom. Its days are numbered ; it is weighed in the balance and found wanting ; and it must speedily fall to rise no more forever.

I tell you only what you must have read in the histories you have studied. When flourished ancient Athens ? Was it not when her Eupatrids were really free and noble ; when they retained the virtues of the olden times, and were chivalric, generous, brave, and patriotic ? Was it the arms of all-conquering Rome that prostrated her in the dust, and left her wallowing for long ages in the mire ? Why gained the Roman a victory which the Persian with far greater forces failed to win ? Because Athens had not men ; because her population had dwindled, or her wealth been exhausted ? By no means. But because she had no Miltiades, no Aristides, no Themistocles. Her Eupatrids had lost their nobility, had ceased to be freemen, and the poor people, brave even to daring, were beaten for the lack of brave and competent leaders. Had the brave old tyrant of the Chersonesus commanded, as at Marathon, the Roman Æmilianus had perhaps shared the fate of the Persian Datis. The decline of Rome dates from the corruption of her nobles, and she fell when they had lost all vestiges of the old Roman virtues.

At the time when the Barbarians began to cross the Rhine and invade the Gallic provinces of the Empire, those provinces were as rich and as populous as modern France, and perhaps even more so ; and yet what more contemptible than the resistance they offered ! Indeed, they seem to have

offered no resistance at all. In reading their history, it seems as if with the Imperial armies the whole population disappeared, and the invaders took possession of a country without inhabitants. Yet the Romano-Gallic people remained on the soil, and in numbers of a hundred, if not of a thousand, to one of the conquerors. France under Charles le Chauve was populous, wealthy, cultivated, and possessed of vast resources both for defence and conquest, as Charlemagn had proved, and yet a handful of Norse pirates were able to ravage her coast with impunity, to sail up her rivers into the interior, to sack even the city of Paris, to plunder her sacred shrines, churches, and monasteries, massacre or enslave her priests and religious, and to threaten the conquest of the whole kingdom, with no resistance worth mentioning but from the dead, and their ravages were interrupted only by the conversion to Christianity of their famous Chief Rollo. Why was this? Because her people were cowards, and could not be induced to fight in their own defence? We all know better. In all ages, and under all dynasties, the French people have been brave and warlike, none more so. It was not the men, but the man that failed not the people, but their Chiefs. Her noblemen, her gentry, lacked the virtues of their order, had become selfish and mean, and were chiefly engaged in plundering the Church and one another. The moment a man appears, the Great Hugh Capet, founder of the third dynasty of French kings, or rather of the line of French existing until from Frankish monarchs, the whole face of things is changed, and the kingdom from being unable to defend itself against the petty expeditions of the Norsemen, suddenly rises to the rank of the first power of Europe. Why again lies Ireland prostrate for ages with the armed heel of the Anglo-Saxon on her neck? Because her people fail? Because she wants men? The armies of England, France, Austria, and Spain have long since proved the contrary. No people are

shrewder, more intellectual, moral, religious, braver, or more capable of endurance. But it is her nobility, her gentry that fail through corruption, venality, or want of national character. She has no chiefs. Give her a man who would be to her what Wellington might have been, what he was to all countries but his own, or a nobility and gentry as truly Irish, as the nobility and gentry of England are English, and she would instantly throw off her foreign oppressor, and rise to a high and commanding position among the free nations of the world. But what can she do without a man, without chiefs, or when those who should be her nobles and her gentlemen are each for himself, without patriotism, without virtue, capable of being bought by a paltry office whenever the British Ministry regard them as worth buying?

All history, if you know how to read it, proves that it is the nobility, or the gentlemen, that make the nation, and determine its rank and character among the nations of the earth, never the people as detached or distinguished from them. I speak not against the people; I have, perhaps, more genuine love and respect for them than have the wordy demagogues who make it their business to flatter and cajole them, that they may use them; but I tell you, young gentlemen, however democratically inclined you may be, that God gives to every nation an aristocracy, titled or untitled, recognized or unrecognized by the civil constitution, hereditary or unhereditary, whose mission it is to guide and lead the people, and to direct, sustain, and defend their interests. When these, by faction, by sloth, by luxury, or venality are deprived of their nobility and strength, or when through the neglect or abuse of their powers they have no longer the capacity or the disposition to discharge the proper duties of their state, the glory of the nation has departed, its days, as I have said, are numbered, and its people are as sheep without a shepherd. As long as a nation is really a living na-

tion, as long as it has a future, and a part to play in the great drama of nations, it has and must have its *generosi*, its nobility, its aristocracy, who, although the smaller part, must always be regarded as its *pars sanior*, and act as its chiefs and counsellors. When these are true and loyal, your nation prospers; when they become base and corrupt, or when they lose the manners, sentiments and virtues of their order, and adopt those of the people, there is, save in God's gracious providence, no longer any hope for the nation. It is on the brink of the precipice, rushing headlong, into the abyss of barbarianism that yawns below. Ask the Oriental States of antiquity, where the nobles lost their nobility, not as they are now losing it by the despotism of the people, but by the despotism of the monarch, who suffered no head but his own to rise above the universal level, if it is not so. Ask ancient Assyria and Egypt, Tyre and Carthage, if it is not so. Let the recently disinterred remains of Nineve, the mummies brought hither from the catacombs of Thebes, the degraded Moslemin groping amid the fallen colonades and broken capitals of Balbec and Palmyra, the poor fisherman drying his nets on the site of ancient Tyre, where once her merchant princes did congregate, or the wild Curd robbing the defenceless traveller, over the graves of forgotten nations read you your ansewer, and teach you better than to listen for one moment to the insane dreams of modern demagogues and radicals, who would persuade you that the strength and glory of a nation are in the ignorance, selfishness, and vulgarity of the many, not in the science, the wisdom, the disinterestedness, the chivalry, the heroism of the few,—the nobility and gentry, by whatever name you choose to call them. The wise man weighs votes, he does not count them. He seeks the approbation of the few, not of the multitude, who, as Pope John the XXII. says, are always wrong. *Quicquid laudat, vituperio dignum est; quicquid cogitat, vanum; quicquid loquitur, falsum;*

*quicquid improbat, bonum; quicquid extollit, infame est.*  
And the most discouraging thing in our beloved country, for I trust that whatever her faults, we all love her, and should were those faults a thousand times greater, is the tendency to place the servant above the master, and the rapid decline of the better class, the disappearance of our gentlemen from high official station, and the entrusting of all affairs to the management of men who want nobility, elevation, and manliness of character.

The prejudice against aristocracy arises from the very common error that if there is an aristocracy it must exist for itself, and that the people must be held to exist for the aristocracy, not the aristocracy for the people. I have as little sympathy as any of my democratic countrymen, with the doctrine which teaches that the many are made to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" to the few. I am a christian, not a pagan, and I hold all men to be of one blood, and to have the common rights of humanity, and one man has and can have no dominion in another, except in consideration of services rendered. I say not with our abolitionists that man can have no property in man, but I do say, after the Supreme Pontiff Alexander the Third, that all men by the law of nature are free. I do not deny the right of the Southern master to the services of his slave; but I do deny that he derives that right from the municipal law which recognizes and defends it. As between him and his slave the master's right is founded, and can be founded, only on the benefits he confers on the slave, and the measure of these benefits is the measure of the services he has the right to exact in return. The slave, no matter what his color or his race, is a man, a human being, with all the natural rights of his master. He has the *jus dominii* of himself as fully as any other man has of himself. I must go against common sense, and the spirit of all Catholic teachings, to deny this. But the master has a claim upon him for the services he ren-

ders him. He protects and nurses him during his infancy, feeds and clothes him during life, and takes care of him in sickness and old age. This may not be, and probably is not, ordinarily as much as the services of the slave are worth to the master; but it is more than the labor of the slave, upon a general average, would be worth to himself, if obliged to take the sole care of himself. Take the class of slaves, and suppose the masters take proper care of them, and do not overwork them, which seldom happens, and there can be no doubt that the slave receives in his maintenance, in the provision made for him in infancy, sickness, and old age, a reasonable compensation for his services, and more than the Northern laborer ever does or can receive for the same amount of labor, for the Northern laborer works nearly double the number of hours that the slave does, with far more intensity, and with fewer recreations. Your negroes when properly treated, are no doubt better off, and better paid for their labor, than they would be if emancipated, and therefore the masters have a right to their services, and to retain them in their present condition. No doubt there are instances in which the relation is abused, but this is another consideration, and to be disposed of on other principles, for the abuse of a thing does not deny the legitimacy of its use.

Society is to be regarded as a whole, as a sort of living organism, in which there are many parts, distinguishable but not separable one from another. All the parts are necessary, all should be knit together in a living union, and move on in concert as a living and reasonable being. The head is not to be valued without the body, nor the body without the members: yet the body should have a head, and the head should be regarded as the more noble part. The aristocracy are not to be separated from the body of the nation, are not to be regarded as existing apart and for themslv e alone, but as existing for the nation, for the service of the people, and the common good of the whole. Nobility is not a per-

sonal right, it is a trust—a trust from God for the common good of the nation. “Let him that would be greatest among you be your servant.” When the nobility forget this,—when they live only for themselves, regard their rank and privileges as their indefeasible property, and use their superiority only in reference to their own selfish ends, they lose their character of *generosi*, forget their nobility, sink to mere churls, and instead of serving the nation are served by it, and instead of guiding and leading society for the common good become an intolerable burden upon the people which they will be sure to attempt to shake off. Such became the old French noblesse under the reign of Louis the XV, the new nobility under the Emperor, the Orleanist noblesse, under “the citizen king,” and hence the revolutions of 1789, 1814, 1830, and 1848, which have threatened the very existence of European society, and which though checked for the moment by the *coup d'etat* of December, 1851, are not yet concluded. Such are rapidly becoming our own American nobility, or aristocracy. Our gentlemen are bankers, sharpers, brokers, stock-jobbers, traders, speculators, attorneys, pettifoggers, and in general worshippers of mammon. They have sometimes the manners, uniformly the sentiments, passions, and churlishness of the lowest of the people, and use the people instead of serving them. Hence the alarm which wise men feel for the safety of our republic, and the real prosperity of our people.

I am well aware that the dominant doctrine of the day is the contrary of the one, which, relying on the wisdom of antiquity and the experience of all ages and nations, I venture to re-assert. The prevalent doctrine of the day is that all good ascends from below, and that every thing is to be condemned that does not operate from low to high. The higher classes instead of guiding and directing the lower, must consent to be guided and directed by them; the flock must chose and commission the pastor; the ignorant must

teach the learned ; the inept instruct the experienced ; the subject give the law to the sovereign ; and the church must follow the instinct of the masses, be fed and governed by the people, instead of feeding and governing them according to the ordination of God. This is the grand heresy of our age. It floats in our atmosphere as a fatal miasma, and we inhale it with every breath. It is the *Welt-Geist* which even men who pass for philosophers bid us worship as the true and ever-living God, and which inspires all the revolutionary movements of our times. But be assured that it is itself from below, not from above, and is as false and as destructive as every thing else that rises to us with smoke from the bottomless pit. Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down to us from the father of lights, with whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning. The whole order of Providence is that the higher should guide and govern the lower, and that whatever is wise and good cometh from above, and operates from high to low, never as the age presumptuously teaches from low to high.

I quarrel not with forms of government ; I find no fault with the political institutions of our country, or the form of civil policy our fathers have bequeathed us. It is not of our republican institutions, nor of the popular power in their administration, that a wise man will complain, but the false and dangerous doctrines, according to which these institutions are interpreted, and with which it is become the fashion to identify them. I accept and defend all the democracy that was incorporated into the American institutions by their original framers, but I do not accept, and I should blush to defend, the vague and destructive democracy which we have borrowed from European radicals, and which has turned the heads of so large a portion of our people. I am,—as the members of the old Jeffersonian party in my boyhood were accustomed to say,—“a republican, but I am not a democrat,” and he who is a democrat in the modern Euro-

pean sense, and the sense now generally adopted, here as elsewhere, is no loyal American citizen; for democracy as now generally understood both at home and abroad means either the unrestricted right of the majority to rule, which is social despotism, or the unrestricted liberty of the individual to do what he pleases, which is anarchy. No institutions more than ours demand the sanctity of law, and none more imperiously demand the existence and influence of a noble or superior class—a real nobility, titled or untitled. It is not necessary that our nobility should be titled, for the title no more makes the noble than the habit makes the monk; nor is it necessary that they should be recognized by the law, and have a civil constitution as in England; but it is necessary that they exist, and that they have the direction of affairs. The larger the sphere we give in our institutions to the great body of the people, the more necessary are the wisdom, the virtue, the chivalry, the personal worth and authority of their natural chiefs to preserve the constitution, and to secure the wise and salutary administration of government.

The great mistake of our politicians of all parties, and perhaps of one party no more than of another, is in supposing that the criterion of truth and virtue is popular sentiment, that the people are competent to teach and direct their natural chiefs, and that they who are in office are not to ascertain and do what seems to them just and proper according to their own reason and conscience, but simply to ascertain and give effect to the wishes of the people, or rather, of the party which has placed them in power. Hence the highest officer in the state, nay, in the nation, becomes but the mere tool of his party, and is held to be as irresponsible, save to his party, as the trowel or the spade in the hands of the workman; even our best men are inclined to echo the sentiment and pander to the prejudices of the mob. They who should be our gentlemen, our noblemen, maintain no person-

al independence, and cease to speak and act as freemen. They lack the courage, the virtue, to stand up as bold and chivalrous knights in defence of truth and justice. They lose the nice sense of honor, the invincible courage, the manliness of character, and the true nobility of feeling, which constitute the freeman or make the nobleman, and become sly and subtle, cunning and artful, seeking not to govern the people, but to use them, and to accomplish their own selfish ends by flattery, cajolery, and intrigue. They stoop to conquer, consent to be slaves of the base passions of the mob that they may be its masters. Hence the baseness and venality of our public men, and our lack, as a people, of the noble virtue of loyalty, in the sense of the French *loyaute*, and our contempt for the rights of our neighbors, which if not corrected must ultimately place us out of the pale of civilized nations.

No doubt others, as well as I, see whither our republic is tending, and feel the necessity of a remedy; but following out the false doctrine borrowed from the old French Jacobins, the greater part of them seek the remedy in popular education, or in the extension and support of common schools. Far be it from me to speak lightly of common schools, but I do not believe that any education can entirely remedy the evil. The age is as mad in its worship of education, as it is in its worship of radical or socialistic democracy. Education at best is far from being omnipotent, and no possible training of youth will infallibly make them what the wants of a free state demand. There is no subject on which there is more disgusting cant vented in our days than this very subject of education, and I fear something worse than cant. It is far easier to educate for evil than for good, for children since the Fall take to evil as naturally as ducks take to water. The enemies of religion and society understand this perfectly well, and hence whenever in their power they seize upon the schools, and seek to control the education

of the young. To accomplish their purposes, they have only to exclude religion from the schools, under the plea of excluding sectarianism, and instead of teaching religion, teach as Frances Wright was accustomed to say, *know-ledge*, and they may soon have a community whose thoughts and affections will be exclusively of the earth earthly.

It is not without design that I have mentioned the name of Francis Wright, the favorite pupil of Jeremy Bentham, and famous infidel lecturer through our country, some twenty years ago ; for I happen to know, what may not be known to you all, that she and her friends were the great movers in the scheme of godless education, now the fashion in our country. I knew this remarkable woman well, and it was my shame to share, for a time, many of her views, for which I ask pardon of God and of my countrymen. I was for a brief time in her confidence, and one of those selected to carry into execution her plans. The great object was to get rid of Christianity, and to convert our Churches into Halls of science. The plan was not to make open attacks on religion, although we might belabor the clergy and bring them into contempt where we could ; but to establish a system of state, we said, *national* schools, from which all religion was to be excluded, in which nothing was to be taught but such knowledge as is verifiable by the senses, and to which all parents were to be compelled by law to send their children. Our complete plan was to take the children from their parents at the age of twelve or eighteen months, and to have them nursed, fed, clothed and trained in these schools at the public expense; but at any rate, we were to have godless schools for all the children of the country, to which the parents would be compelled by law to send them. The first thing to be done was to get this system of schools established. For this purpose, a secret society was formed, and the whole country was to be organized somewhat on the plan of the Carbonari of Italy, or as were the revolutionists

throughout Europe by Bazard preparatory to the revolutions of 1820 and 1830. This organization was commenced in 1829, in the city of New York, and to my own knowledge was effected throughout a considerable part of New York State. How far it was extended in other States, or whether it is still kept up I know not, for I abandoned it in the latter part of the year 1830, and have since had no confidential relations with any engaged in it; but this much I can say, the plan has been successfully pursued, the views we put forth have gained great popularity, and the whole action of the country on the subject has taken the direction we sought to give it. I have observed too that many who were associated with us and relied upon to carry out the plan, have taken the lead in what has been done on the subject. One of the principal movers of the scheme had no mean share in organizing the Smithsonian Institute, and is now, I believe, one of the representatives of our government at an Italian court. It would be worth inquiring, if there were any means of ascertaining, how large a share this secret infidel society, with its members all through the country unsuspected by the public, and unknown to each other, yet all known to a central committee, and moved by it, have had in giving the extraordinary impulse to godless education which all must have remarked since 1830, an impulse which seems too strong for any human power now to resist.

But though such an education as we are laboring to give American children in our common schools, is only fitted to make them infidels, libertines, sharpers and rogues, I do not believe even a thoroughly religious education given, in Catholic schools by Catholic teachers and professors, would wholly remedy the evil, because the practical part of our education is never received within the school room, but at home, in the streets, in the saloons, from associates, and the general habits, manners, customs, and tone of the society in which children grow up; and because not natural training but grace

alone can elevate our fallen nature to genuine virtue. The schoolhouse can never be a substitute for the church, the schoolmaster for the priest, or education for the sacraments. Nevertheless, education can do something, and it is the ordinary human mode by which we are to attempt to secure the virtue of a community. That is, a religious education, not merely instruction in simply human knowledge.

But there is no greater mistake than that of placing our chief reliance on common schools, however well organized, and however religious, or of expecting our security from the education of the mass, as seems to be the general opinion of our countrymen. With a territory stretching from the Atlantic, and which will soon stretch, in all probability, from the Isthmus of Darien to the North Pole, we have not a single institution deserving the name of University; and claiming to be a reading people, we stand in regard to public libraries, the lowest on the list of civilized nations. There is not a single branch of literature or science which demands erudition for its treatment, that can be treated by the American scholar without going abroad to consult foreign libraries. No adequate provision is made for the higher class of liberal studies, for the higher branches of genuine scholarship. We have, indeed, a good military academy, a good naval school, perhaps, and some passable law schools; but in matters of political and civil administration, of statesmanship and diplomacy, we have no system of training, and are compelled to rely on ineptness and inexperience. Yet we boast of being an enlightened people. Our whole land is, so to speak, covered over with common schools, filled with common school libraries composed of a few dozen wishy-washy volumes each, and we seem to imagine that to read, write and cipher is all that is necessary to enlighten a people, and to make them wise and virtuous, competent to all the complicated affairs of civil and social life.

I complain not that common schools are universal, I com-

plain not that they do not teach more branches and turn out more thorough scholars. They already attempt too much, more than is requisite for the mass of a people, more than the great body of our children can study to any advantage. Common schools are well enough in their place, though less important than our age would have us believe. They can impart as much instruction as the people, considering their ordinary duties and avocations in life, can acquire; but they cannot suffice for the wants of a nation. You can never make all the people scholars, give to all a liberal training—not, if you will, for lack of ability on their part, but for lack of opportunity, and for the necessary incompatibility between such training and the menial offices of life, which require the constant labor and application of the great majority of every community. These offices unfit one for liberal studies, and liberal studies unfit one for them. Give, if it were possible, to the whole community the education, the culture, the refinement and elevated manners and tastes of the few, and without which a nation remains uncivilized, the great business of life would come to a stand-still, and your nation would be like an army without privates, or a ship without common sailors. On the other hand to reduce all education and all culture to the level of your common schools, is to have no officers, none qualified to take the command and fill the higher offices of civilized society. The Mexican war taught our democratic statesmen the value of West Point, and we shall not very soon see again ignorant civilians chosen in preference to trained soldiers, to command our troops. The great bulk of every community always has depended and always will depend on the leadership in all things of the few.

Here, then, you see the significance of liberal studies, and their absolute necessity to every enlightened and well ordered state. Liberal studies are the studies of the few, they are the studies of freemen, that is, of gentlemen, and their office is to qualify them to be wise and prudent, just and noble,

able guides and leaders, that is, the faithful and competent servants of the community. It is not because you have better blood than others, it is not that society exists for you, for you all nature blooms, and for you the people live and labor, that you are to pursue liberal studies, and acquire the knowledge, the tastes and accomplishments of gentlemen, but that you may exert a wise and salutary influence on the great body of the nation. You are for the nation, not the nation for you; you are to sustain it, not it you. Your liberal education is a trust which you hold from God for the people, and you are to use it, not for your own private benefit, but in their service; not as a facile means of compelling them to serve you, but as the necessary means of serving them.

In the view of the case I have presented, the important thing in every nation, above all in every popularly constituted state, is not as we have foolishly imagined, common school education, is not the education of the mass, but the education of the gentlemen. When, what we call the upper classes are properly trained—which by the by they are not, with us—when they have the principles, the virtues, the habits and the tastes proper to their order, your state will flourish. It is the few that lift the many, and the virtues of the aristocracy that secure the virtues of the people, on the principle I have all along contended for, that all good is from above, and operates from high to low, not as a wild and inept democracy will have it, from low to high.

Do not suppose, gentlemen, that I am unaware that the doctrine I have set forth is directly opposed to the popular doctrine of our country, or that I need to be told that it may easily be misapprehended, and made the occasion of representing me as opposed to the people, and in favor of despotism, monarchy, and a titled aristocracy. I am well aware of all this, for I am not utterly without experience, and if I sought to win popularity, or to gain the applause of the multitude, I should have brought out a very different doctrine,

and proved my utter unworthiness to be your orator on an occasion like this. I cannot boast of a long line of distinguished ancestors, I cannot boast of having received even a liberal education in any adequate sense of that word; but I can with honest pride boast that I am and always have been, according to the measure of my light and ability, a freeman. I glory in bending my knee to God and to God's minister, but I have never yet learned to bend it to the mob, or to surrender the freedom and independence of my own soul to the despotism of public opinion. I claim to be a man, an individual, with rights which I will die sooner than surrender, and duties, which I dare not neglect. As far as I am able I labor to form a true and noble public opinion, not to obey public opinion whatever it may be. I ask not what the people will say, but what is just, what is true, what is necessary or useful to be said.

Such, gentlemen, I conceive is the spirit of the true scholar, of the gentleman, of the freeman, and such is the spirit with which I wish you to be animated. You are, I take it for granted, Catholics, and as such you have been taught the truth from God himself, and know what you are to believe and to do, and have no need to learn it from popular opinion, from the *Welt-Geist*, or spirit of the age. You are instructed from above; therefore you can safely labor to form the popular mind, without danger of misforming it, and in your several spheres prove yourselves safe guides and leaders of the people. Understand well that this is your mission, and dare discharge it, fearlessly, bravely, heroically, whether you have the multitude with you, or have, as most likely will be the case, the multitude against you. Be brave, courteous, chivalrous knights, in defence of truth and justice, so shall you be without fear and without reproach; so shall you serve your country, avert, it may be, the dangers which threaten it, gain a name, which "posterity will not willingly let die," and, what is infinitely better, everlasting life and eternal glory in Heaven.





3 0112 105865379